

Rooney Ranch  
Junction of Rooney Road  
and West Alameda Parkway  
Morrison Vicinity  
Jefferson County  
Colorado

HABS No. CO-65

HABS  
COLO,  
30-MORR.V,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, CO. 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROONEY RANCH

HABS No. CO-65

HABS  
COLO,  
30-MORRIS,  
1-

Location:

Junction of Rooney Road and West Alameda Parkway,  
Morrison vicinity, Jefferson County, Colorado

UTM Coordinates, Morrison, Colorado Quad:

- A. 13/483860 4393200
- B. 13/483840 4392250
- C. 13/483040 4392250
- D. 13/483040 4393200

Date of Construction:

c. 1865 to c. 1975

Present Owner:

Alexander Rooney  
Otis Alex Rooney  
Eileen Louis Rooney  
George R. and Kathryn Rooney  
Lynda P. Simmons  
James P. Simmons  
James Addison and Virginia Dawn Vesey  
Security Realty  
Jefferson County Open Space Department

Present Use:

Private residence, public recreation

Significance:

Rooney Ranch, one of the oldest ranches in Jefferson County, Colorado, is significant for its local historical associations and for the high quality of masonry construction exhibited in its principal structures.

The significance of the ranch to the historical and architectural development of Jefferson County was recognized in 1975 when the site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Rooney Ranch was designated a Jefferson County Landmark the following year.

Historian:

Kenneth M. Gambrill  
Kathryn M Kuranda  
Colorado Department of Highways  
August, 1983

## Introduction

Rooney Ranch is a 192.49 acre complex located at the junction of Rooney Road and West Alameda Parkway in Jefferson County, Colorado. The architectural and historic significance of the site to the development of Jefferson County was recognized in 1975 when the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Rooney Ranch was designated a Jefferson County Landmark the following year.

The proposed construction of the Centennial Parkway/C-470, a 26-mile, four-lane roadway with a detached multi-use trail, will involve a tract east of the ranch complex and within the nineteenth century ranch boundaries. The Federal Highway Administration is the lead agency in this proposed undertaking. The Colorado Department of Highways is the state agency responsible for completing the environmental studies, preliminary project engineering, and project construction.

In compliance with Section 800.3 of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regulations, the effect of the proposed construction upon the Rooney Ranch was evaluated. It was determined that the undertaking would exert a direct adverse effect upon the site. To mitigate this finding recordation to HABS standards was prescribed.

## Historical Background

Alexander Rooney, founder of the Rooney Ranch, came to Colorado in 1859 with the intention of amassing capital to finance a farm in his home state of Iowa.<sup>1</sup> After discouraging results in the gold fields near South Park,<sup>2</sup> Rooney recognized the profit potential in provisioning miners in the mountain camps. By September, 1860, he was operating a trading post in the mining camp of California Gulch. In additions to trading, Rooney also ran a modest freight line between Denver and the mountain settlement.<sup>3</sup>

Rooney's career as a merchant was, however, short lived. Unable to absorb losses incurred by a business partner during the winter of 1860-61, he abandoned the trading post in favor of a dairy operation that spring. The dairy was successful, and by October Rooney was seeking a permanent site for a winter ranch in the foothills near Denver.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Rooney, Letter to Emeline Littlefield, 18 November, 1860, (Colorado Historic Society, Denver, Colorado).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5 June 1860.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 11 September 1860, Rooney describes his trading post as a log house measuring 18'-0" x 26'-0".

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23 October 1861.

During the winter of 1862, Rooney returned to Iowa to marry Emeline Littlefield, a school teacher from Alamosa, Iowa.<sup>5</sup> According to Rooney family tradition, the newlyweds were accompanied on their return to Colorado by Emeline's brother, Thomas Littlefield, who became Alexander's ranching partner.<sup>6</sup>

Alex and Emeline Rooney established permanent residence on the Jefferson County ranch during the 1860's, and subsequently raised six children, Alice, Nora, Otis, Will, Charlie and Florence. Early improvements to the property included construction of a log dwelling to stock corrals. The log dwelling was converted to a barn following the erection of the existing two-story stone house, circa 1865.<sup>7</sup> Sandstone for the main house was quarried in site and lime, used in building mortar and interior plaster, was produced in a kiln located on the ranch. Timbers from the first log structure were incorporated into the framing of the rear elevation of the existing barn in 1890.<sup>8</sup>

During the late 19th century, the Rooney Ranch evolved from a modest dairy operation to a horse and cattle ranch encompassing 4,480 acres.<sup>9</sup> The early success of the Ranch was due, in part, to the family's friendly relations with the region's nomadic tribe of Ute Indians. Tradition contends that the Utes, lead by Chief Colorow, continued their annual pilgrimages to the ranch's mineral springs and held councils on the bluff overlooking the ranch on the site of the Inspiration Tree Picnic Area.<sup>10</sup>

Travel between the ranch and front range communities was improved in 1879 with the construction of Rooney Road, an artery which bisects the existing ranch complex. Originally a wagon road, this link connected the east slope on the hogback with the road to Golden, Colorado.<sup>11</sup>

It is probable that the 1870's also witnessed the transition of the ranch from a dairy to a horse and cattle raising operation. The present generation of the Rooney family recounts that the ranch concentrated on

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to Alexander Rooney, 24 February 1862, (Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado).

<sup>6</sup> Telephone interview with Alex Rooney, 4 November 1981.

<sup>7</sup> The date of the construction for the Main House (circa 1865) is based upon preliminary source documents, interviews with the Rooney Family, and on-site inspection. Although the Rooney family has traditionally assigned a construction date of 1860 to the dwelling, Alexander Rooney's letters to Emeline Littlefield indicate that Main House construction was begun sometime after 1861.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Alex Rooney, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Barrett. "Historic Rooney Ranch Occupied by Descendants", The Rocky Mountain News, 4 September 1976, pp. 13B-14B.

<sup>10</sup> Lakewood Historical Society, Tour, Rooney Ranch, 25 July 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Alex Rooney, op. cit.

the production of Galloway Cattle and Morgan horses during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

The economic depression accompanying the Panic of 1893 forced the sale of substantial acreage. However, the ranch's structural complex, including the present main house and barn, remained under Rooney ownership.<sup>13</sup>

Alexander Rooney died in 1895. The ranch passed to his son, Otis Alexander Rooney, who continued its operation until his death in 1947. A complete chain of title recording ranch owners is included at the conclusion of this document.

Otis Rooney and his wife raised four children on the ranch. Under Otis' ownership, Hereford replaced Galloway Cattle as the principal ranch stock.<sup>14</sup> Improvements to the property during this period included the construction of the Granary (1939) and Inspiration Tree Picnic Area (1938). A root cellar was also appended to the rear of the main house (1940).<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the ranch, Otis Rooney also operated a coal mine located several hundred meters east of the historic site boundaries. Known as the Satanic Mine, the colliery employed approximately 77 men and included a complex containing a four story hotel, outbuildings and breaker. The Satanic Mine, later known as Bluebird, closed in August of 1932. No structures survive on its site.<sup>16</sup>

Alex Rooney assumed control of the ranch upon his father's death in 1947. Alex and his wife, Evelyn raised their three sons, Albert, Otis and George, on the property. Alex represents the last generation to operate the ranch as an agricultural concern. In addition to raising Hereford cattle, Alex also operated a riding academy during the 1940's and 1950's.<sup>17</sup> Improvements to the ranch under Alex Rooney's tenure include the construction of the James Vesey House (1950), the Eileen Rooney House (1955), the Garage and Apartment (circa 1955), the Alex Rooney House (1959), and the Inspiration Tree Picnic Area (1954).

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<sup>12</sup> Jeanne Varnell, "Rooney Family History Reads Like Wild West Classic", The Lakewood Sentinel, 19 July 1973, pp. 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> "Rooney Ranch", Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, June 1975, Item #8.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Alex Rooney, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> The dates of construction for non-historic structures are based upon telephone interviews with Albert Rooney, 3 November 1981 and 1 December 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Telephone interview with Albert Rooney, 3 November 1981.

<sup>17</sup> Tour of Rooney Ranch, op. cit.

Commercial cattle production on the Rooney Ranch ended in 1971.<sup>18</sup> Since that time, the ranch complex has become a residential compound. Land sales, including an 80 acre parcel to the Jefferson County Open Space Department (Inspiration Tree Picnic Area), have reduced the acreage controlled by the Rooney family. The ranch, nonetheless, retains its rural character and architectural integrity.

### Building Descriptions

The Rooney Ranch is a National Register Historic Site composed of fourteen structures forming a northwest to southeast linear complex bisected by Rooney Road. The building descriptions of HABS No. CO-65-A to HABS No. CO-65-Q reflect the present conditions of the Rooney Ranch structures. Building names are those used by the Rooney family.

The building identifications correspond to the identification system used in the property site plan accompanying this report.

Please see the following for information on specific structures on the Rooney Ranch:

HABS No. CO-65-A	Main House
HABS No. CO-65-B	Rooney Barn
HABS No. CO-65-C	Springhouse No. 1
HABS No. CO-65-D	Granary
HABS No. CO-65-E	Blacksmith Shop
HABS No. CO-65-F	Garage No. 1
HABS No. CO-65-G	Basement House
HABS No. CO-65-H	Duplex
HABS No. CO-65-I	Garage No. 2
HABS No. CO-65-J	Grandma Rooney's House
HABS No. CO-65-K	Garage No. 3
HABS No. CO-65-L	Eileen Rooney House
HABS No. CO-65-M	Garage and Apartment
HABS No. CO-65-N	James Vesey House
HABS No. CO-65-O	Alex Rooney House
HABS No. CO-65-P	Springhouse No. 2
HABS No. CO-65-Q	Inspiration Tree Picnic Area

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<sup>18</sup> Varnell, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

Chain of Title:

Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land on which the structure stands are in the Office of the Clerk and Recorder of Jefferson County, Golden, Colorado.

1866 Patent. By "'An Act in addition to certain Acts granting bounty land to certain Officers and Soldiers who have been engaged in the military service of the United States". Recorded on November 21, 1934 in Book 290, Page 567. United States to Cristoro Torres who assigned the land to Alexander Rooney. Conveys the S 1/2 of the SE 1/4 of Sec. 23 and the W 1/2 of the SW 1/4 of Sec. 24.

1873 Homestead. Recorded on December 17, 1957 in Book 1095, Page 380. United States to Alexander Rooney. Conveys the N 1/2 of the SE 1/4 and the E 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Sec. 23.

1911 Treasurer's Deed. Recorded September 6, 1911 at Book 148, Page 148. M. Baker, Treasurer of Jefferson County to J.M. Johnson, Jr.

- 1911 Quit Claim Deed. Recorded September 6, 1911 at Book 155, Page 472. J.M. Johnson, Jr. to Florence R. Johnson, Otis A. Rooney, Alice Derby and Nora Pike.
- 1911 Warranty Deed. Recorded Spetember 6, 1911 at Book 173, Page 134. Florence R. Johnson, Otis A. Rooney, Alice Derby, formerly Alice Rooney, Nora Pike, formerly Nora Rooney, legatees and sole heirs of Alexander Rooney and Emeline Rooney to George Townsend.
- 1911 Quit Claim Deed. Recorded September 6, 1911 at Book 155, Page 474. George Townsend to Otis A. Rooney.
- 1945 Warranty Deed. Recorded March 15, 1945 at Book 504, Page 256. Otis A. Rooney to Alexander Rooney.
- 1962 Warranty Deed. Recorded September 21, 1962 at Book 1524, Page 386. Alexander Rooney to Otis Alex Rooney and Patricia Ann Rooney.



1975    Death Certificate of Patricia A. Rooney.  
Recorded October 31, 1977 at Book 3093, Page  
647.    Release of Inheritance Tax Lien, Recorded  
November 17, 1977 at Book 3102, Page 590.

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Rooney, Alexander. Letters to Emeline Littlefield, 1859-1861. (Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.)

Rooney, Albert. Telephone Interview, 3 November 1981.

Rooney, Albert. Telephone Interview, 17 November 1981.

Rooney, Albert. Telephone Interview, 1 December 1981.

Rooney, Alex. Telephone Interview, 4 November 1981.

"Rooney Ranch". Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. June 1974.

Shadan, Judy. Personal Interview with Alex Rooney, Summer, 1975.

"Southwest Scrapbook, The Rooney Ranch . . . 100 Years". The Southwesterner, 14 January 1965.

Varnell, Jeanne. "Rooney Family History Reads Like Wild West Classic". The Lakewood Sentinel, 19 July 1973, pp. 5-6.